

## Reason And Rebellion

Graeme Nicholson

Political institutions come in great variety, because constitutions differ from each other from the ground up, and because each constitution comprises a great number of institutions: an upper house, a lower house, and so on. But my interest will be served by looking away from all that. I believe that all this variety can be comprehended under the aegis of a single head: *the* political institution as such, the state. Some kinds of study are enhanced by attention to detail, but in philosophy the detail can sometimes distract us from investigating the principles and grounds of things. The great tradition of political philosophy undertook to show that the state, *the* political institution, had its grounding in reason, and was therefore justified, and that this justification could be expressed in philosophical thoughts and arguments. As to particular institutions (parliament, judiciary, etc.), these were generally shown to have their justification and grounding too, but philosophers would have considered it eccentric to investigate them without preliminary attention to the state as such.

To hold that the state derives from reason differentiates it from the other institutions that fill up our lives, religious bodies, clubs, and especially economic institutions. That was stressed right at the opening of Aristotle's *Politics*. The sphere of the *polis* is that which is highest and greatest in human life, and it is the home of reason, speech, deliberation, decision. Economic life is pursued within a lesser, subordinate unit, the village (*kome*). Hegel too subordinated civil society, whose domain was economic, to the state, the highest expression of objective spirit, the "ethical mind...manifest and revealed to itself, knowing and thinking itself..."<sup>1</sup> In claiming that state and law were the manifestation of reason, these philosophers were disputing the adequacy of certain anthropological opinions: that the state originated in conquest (a war-lord subjugating some populace), or in patriarchy (men ruling over women), or as a reflex from pre-human forms of life (the dominance of one baboon over others). Hegel, of course, did not invoke the rational foundation of the state in order to prevent inquiry into historical origins - the latter was perfectly in order for him, but it had to be comprehended by a philosophical history that would demonstrate the presence of reason in history.

Looking generally at the philosophers, then, to summarize, we can interpret the mainstream doctrine as implying that justice, liberty and welfare were the works of the state. That expresses some of the content of the idea of reason, and offers criteria for estimating the merits of this constitution or that one, this law or that one. In practice, of course, the criteria always need to be developed in more detail.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, translated by T. M. Knox (London: Oxford, 1952), Sec. 257

What ancient and medieval philosophers took for granted was that the state was a community of some kind, a society, an association. But in modern times, this equation came to lapse. We came to conceive of the state as the institution that *governs* society, conceiving the latter as a criss-crossing of many associations and many communities, all subject to state regulation to be sure, but having their own being and defining their own ends without necessary reference to a state. And because we have had the experience of community, it then became possible to imagine community without state regulation. It even became possible to see the community itself as the locus of reason, rather than the state. A momentous development! Under what conditions did that arise?

A further claim made by both Aristotle and Hegel was that one function of the state and the system of law was to protect private property. And they both regarded private property as an institution that was quite in accord with reason.<sup>2</sup> Yet that very point was called into question again and again, especially in the period after Hegel. The challenge arose because private property seemed to introduce a rupture into the *community*. Property is not merely a two-term relationship in which one party (individual or group) has the ownership of some item (estate, machine, whatever); it is a three-term relationship; all other parties are *denied* a right to that item, and that is what the law of property means most of all. Could traditional philosophy now show that reason sanctioned such a division introduced into the community? We shall be looking at how the challenge was launched by the first great anarchist theorist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, someone who did appreciate the complexity of the question. Obviously, Proudhon's challenge raised an even bigger question, whether the state as such could claim to be grounded in reason. We'll explore that question with reference to the most famous and influential anarchist of them all, Michael Bakunin, a disciple of Proudhon. These critiques are certainly important for anyone who scrutinizes political institutions. And yet it is not only the straight political opposition or antagonism that is of interest here.

The history of this argument raises the further question what we are to understand by reason itself. It is no adequate reading of this history to rehearse certain "arguments" made by the anarchists against property and state, and then to review the "counter-arguments" that their opponents have made, or could have made. That would be thinking of reason merely as our subjective capacity of calculating and making judgments. But if the state really *is* grounded in reason, and if property really *is* grounded in reason, then reason inheres in and informs these very structures of social reality. Or if it is the community instead that embodies reason, not the state, then reason is incarnate in the community, and the state is an institution of unreason. Our question concerns the *substantive* idea of reason, rather than the subjective, and therefore the opposition we have introduced affords the opportunity of a phenomenology of reason itself. Where there is an anarchist rebellion against property and state, where does reason stand?

We shall think of anarchism, then, not as a set of opinions which might be more or less rational, but as an historical phenomenon, a movement in which we may or may not discern the presence of reason.

---

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, Ch. 8; Book II, Ch. 1 - 4. Hegel, *op. cit.*, Sections 41 - 46.

### A Brief History

Anarchism belongs to *modern* history. If you regard it merely as a set of doctrines, then perhaps you can see some antecedents for the doctrines in ancient philosophers (commentators often refer to Zeno, the first Stoic). But if you look at it concretely, as a movement, embodying theory and practice both, it becomes clear that there could not have been anarchism in the ancient world or in medieval or early modern times. Anarchism emerged as a recognizable current in the aftermath of the French Revolution. At that time, the world witnessed the overthrow of the *ancien regime*, the establishment of a Republic, the struggle of distinct factions in the succession of temporary governments, and all the changes that affected education, religion and culture. It also saw Napoleon emerge as Emperor and war-lord. But according to many historians,<sup>3</sup> the middle years of the Revolution also brought an awakening among the lowest classes of France, in Paris and the countryside alike, who organized themselves into "sections" and "communes", small-scale communities for mutual protection in times of violence and for economic production and distribution. Their public face in the Republic was as *sans-culottes*. Though the *sans-culottes* were unable to shape the course of events in the political crises of the 1790's, their class did come into nationwide self-consciousness, perhaps the first public appearance of the proletariat. As it grew throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it attained increasing self-consciousness, achieving political self-expression in the Paris Commune of 1871.<sup>4</sup> By this time, anarchism had also become defined as a current of thought, claiming the allegiance of many of the *communards* and the workers as a whole in France. The central influence was that of Proudhon.

There is a continuing history that springs from that experience. Anarchism struck deep roots in Russia and its tributary countries, especially Ukraine, where modernizing and Westernizing influences encountered other currents: pan-Slavism and the rural *narodniki*. This potent fusion came to expression at the time of the 1917 Revolution. While the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks struggled to gain control of the state apparatus, the peasants of Ukraine and the workers and sailors of St. Petersburg responded rather to the anarchists' appeal to freedom and self-organization.<sup>5</sup> Yet the Red Army did secure control of the whole Soviet territory for Lenin and his successors, with great violence.

Spanish anarchists participated along with other groups in combatting the Fascist putsch of 1936, and in the civil war that followed they not only engaged in combat, but carried forth an amazing revolution in social and economic life in the areas where they were strongest, especially Andalusia and Catalonia. The elimination of class differences, the libertarian self-management, even at points the abolition of money, all accompanied

---

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Guerin, *La Lutte de Classes sous la Premiere Republique (1793 - 1797)*, second edition, Paris, 1968; Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution* (London: Heinemann, 1909).

<sup>4</sup> Kropotkin, "The Commune of Paris," in P. A. Kropotkin, *Selected Essays on Anarchism and Revolution*, ed. M. A. Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: The M. I. T. Press, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> The history is recounted in Voline [V. M. Eichenbaum], *The Unknown Revolution: Kronstadt 1921; Ukraine 1918 - 21*, translated by Holley Cantine (London: Freedom Press, 1955).

by an increase in productivity -- these achievements are well documented by credible eye-witnesses including George Orwell.<sup>6</sup>

The New Left of the 1960's in North America and Europe combined an anti-war movement with a civil rights movement, and was deeply imbued with anarchist currents as well as humanist and socialist commitments. In the U. S. A., it drew not only upon European anarchism but also the historical American anarchism represented by such figures as Benjamin Tucker and Henry David Thoreau.<sup>7</sup>

What I have sketched here is a continuing history. It is not a random collection of distinct episodes. For the fact is that those who participated in some of the later struggles were well aware of the earlier ones and drew upon them, seeking to apply what experience had already shown. One example of this can be seen in Diego Abad de Santillan, whose book, *The Economic Organization of the Revolution*, drawing heavily on the experience of past revolutions, offered guidance to the anarchist collectives in the period after 1936.<sup>8</sup> We can discern common themes in all these periods, and I shall single out a few of them in the coming pages. The themes do not merely lie behind us in the dust of past history, but they bear upon our contemporary dilemmas. Could they be the expression of reason in history?

### Property

Proudhon shows in his writing his double character, one who is swift and powerful in emotion, a romantic, yet at other times overly subtle and complex, a dialectician. In his first major publication, in 1840, he expressed the first aspect of his personality: *What is Property? First Memoir*,<sup>9</sup> answering his own question with the famous words "Property is theft."

He did not mean to imply, as some of his critics argued, that there was a *prior* property owner who was the victim of this theft - that would indeed be contradictory, for then he would be assuming the property structure that he was seeking to explain. It was, rather, the whole of the community that was the victim of the primordial theft and that remains perpetually the victim. That community did not function as an original proprietor, as is evident from Proudhon's clarifications. The three-termed relationship that is called *property* can take on different forms, and it was just one of these forms that he was

---

<sup>6</sup> *Homage to Catalonia* [1938] (London: Penguin, 1955). A more detailed study is Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> One good anthology documenting these figures is Irving L. Horowitz, *The Anarchists* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> See the documentation in Daniel Guerin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*. Translated by Mary Klopper (New York: Monthly Review Press), pp. 121 - 126.

<sup>9</sup> A longer book followed on the same subject in 1846, *System of Economic Contradictions, or the Philosophy of Poverty*, which became the subject of Marx's criticism in his sarcastic pamphlet *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Proudhon's works are anthologized in translation in *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, edited by Stewart Edwards, translated by Elizabeth Fraser (London: Macmillan, 1969).

discussing in his *Memoir*,<sup>10</sup> and seeking to derive. One might possess something only when one was making use of it, a relationship Proudhon called "usufruct", and in that case one's right to exclude others was accordingly limited: only so long as I claim *X* in usufruct can I hinder you from using it. But an utterly different relationship arises where there are no such conditions of use, the kind of property called in France *aubaine*, and in other countries often *dominium*. Property right of this kind was absolute, without conditions, and incorporated no limit in the right to sell the items, give them away, or to abuse them utterly. *Dominium* also differed from many feudal property relations - title to a fief did not usually include the right to sell or otherwise alienate the property, for the title was limited by one's obligations to the feudal lord. Proudhon's analysis was limited to *aubaine*.

What was to be expected when even jurists, law professors and Academy prize winners confuse PROPERTY with possession in its various forms: rent, tenant farming, long-lease, usufruct, and enjoyment of things subject to wear and tear? [1863 - 64]<sup>11</sup>

It is no exaggeration to see the critique of modern capitalism or possessive individualism in this analysis of Proudhon, though that gives no grounds for supposing, as some critics do,<sup>12</sup> that Proudhon's outlook was nostalgic for the Middle Ages. He expected to see *aubaine* quite superceded, not reversed into feudal rights, superceded by a revolutionary working class.

The working class would expropriate the large-scale factories and estates that were the means of production, and introduce a new administration of them through organs of popular management. This was anarchist: the abolition of state control was the essential condition for this.

Proudhon's proposals contained in germ many of the complex issues that pre-occupied revolutionaries in the decades to come. For one thing, he believed that small-scale property was relatively harmless; he wished only to collectivize big industry and agriculture. Later on, more radical elements in the anarchist movement came to scorn half-measures of that sort as the hesitations of a *petit bourgeois*, bringing a division of opinion that persisted for a long time, especially in Spain in the 1920's and 30's.

When, in the *Memoir*, he declared himself an anarchist (Edwards, p. 88) that was not only because state power protected property, but also because the hateful relationships of domination, class snobbery and privilege that had been bestowed on property had radiated originally from the state. For Proudhon, the work of the French Revolution was to be continued: not only royal power, but now property, its reflection, is to be overthrown. Property was for him an intractable mass of tradition that stood over against the thinking intelligence, a rebuke to self-consciousness from an alien structure, an

---

<sup>10</sup> For the following, see the Edwards anthology, pp. 125 - 131, that quotes texts from later years.

<sup>11</sup> Edwards, p. 125.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Edwards himself, in the introduction to his anthology.

irrational surd, resembling in some ways the category of the *pratico-inerte* that emerged later in J.-P. Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

In defying the state, the anarchists disputed its role as the fount of legitimacy, and in practice they accorded no veneration to the laws that protect private property. While sometimes believing in laws of nature or laws of reason (see William Godwin, *The Inquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 1793), they never conceded an equivalent status to the legislation of the state. The socialists' critique of law pinpointed its bias in stemming from class interest: capitalists and others get legislation passed that benefits the powerful at the expense of the weak. Yet while anarchists have endorsed this, the main impetus of their argument led in a different direction. The socialist critique by itself leads to the conclusion that a socialist regime, or even just a fair regime, would see to it that laws were passed that served equally the interests of all. Yet that is difficult indeed to realize in practice. The ongoing torments of liberal and social-democratic theory arise from the effort to show how laws may still serve the interests of all even where much of the inequality arising from the property system remains in place. Granting that there is a class bias in the presently-existing legislation, anarchists take the argument further to focus on the state as such, for it brings about a power bias that fuels the class bias. In the end, they have argued, it is impossible for a state government to introduce equality or freedom.

### The State

Michael Bakunin (1814 - 1876) was a still more radical anarchist, putting the questions of state and law more sharply. Systems that profess to be democratic give a grounding for the state and the rule of law in the consent of the governed. The social-contract theory is one form of that. Yet Bakunin rejects this theory, which he summarizes so; "In order not to destroy each other completely, [human beings] conclude a *contract*, formal or tacit, whereby they surrender some of their freedom to assure the rest. This contract becomes the foundation of society, or rather of the State."<sup>13</sup> But in going on to demolish the very idea of a social contract in these pages, Bakunin in effect denies any doctrine that would justify state power by reference to popular consent. "A republican State, based upon universal suffrage, could be very despotic, more despotic even than the monarchical State, if, under the pretext of representing everybody's will, it were to bring down the weight of its collective power upon the will and the free movement of each of its members."<sup>14</sup> He seeks in these pages to undermine the illusion that it is the state that guarantees us freedom.<sup>15</sup> The hidden force of the liberal argument, he shows, is to seduce the population to trade off their liberty for the sake of security and welfare, and then, mendaciously, present this welfare as if it were liberty. Even on its own terms, moreover, the trade-off is a devil's bargain. For (a) every state is particularist, undermining the unity

---

<sup>13</sup> *Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism* [1867], excerpted in Sam Dolgoff, ed., *Bakunin on Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), quoting from p.128.

<sup>14</sup> *op. cit.*, p.130.

<sup>15</sup> "Liberty is indivisible; one cannot curtail a part of it without killing all of it. This little part you are curtailing is the very essence of my liberty; it is all of it." p. 129.

of humankind through projects of imperialism and war against other states (pp. 133 - 134). Nothing is more contrary to welfare than war. Moreover, (b) the state is an elite conspiracy aimed within, against the population of their own nation. On this, there are many texts one might select from Bakunin, often powerful diatribes that leave us gasping, and wondering whether they could really be of contemporary relevance. Here is part of one from 1870, from a text called *Science and the Urgent Revolutionary Task*:

"[Government] is the science of covering whole countries with the finest net of bureaucratic organization, and, by means of regulations, decrees, and other measures, shackling, disuniting, and enfeebling the working people so that they shall not be able to get together, unite or advance, so that they shall always remain in the salutary condition of relative ignorance - that is, salutary for the government, for the State, and for the ruling classes - a condition rendering it difficult for the people to become influenced by new ideas and dynamic personalities. This is the sole aim of any governmental organization, of the permanent conspiracy of the government against the people. And this conspiracy, openly avowed as such, embraces the entire diplomacy, the internal administration - military, civil, police, courts, finances, and education, and the Church.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, Bakunin was drawing here on his own experience of the Czarist regime in Imperial Russia, where administrative, military and ecclesiastical power fused in a tight knot: a conspiracy united the conscious intentions of the members of an elite. Bakunin always saw military conquest as the foundation of the state. But such conquest leaves its lasting effects for centuries. Even when the battles are long over and won, and even where no conspirators gather in unison, the relationship of domination lasts. There continues the domination of a tiny minority over the vast masses of working people, the tiny group being no different in terms of intelligence or physical force, merely associating and organizing among themselves, on the grounds of their common education and access to leisure time. The state, the matrix of domination, is the absolute institution,<sup>17</sup> centralizing all functions into its hands, and forming a colossus that seems impregnable. The relation of domination is, for Bakunin, the root of the class system. The latter does not spring from processes of production, which are pre-eminently in the keeping of the working people. Bakunin continues the diatribe, picturing the masses of people up against the absolute institution.

---

<sup>16</sup> Excerpt drawn from G. P. Maximoff, ed., *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe; and Collier Macmillan Limited, 1953), p. 366.

And it is against this huge organization, armed with all means, mental and material, lawful and lawless, and which in an extremity can always count on the co-operation of all or nearly all the ruling classes, that the poor people have to struggle. The people, though having an overwhelming preponderance in numbers, are unarmed, ignorant, and deprived of any organization! Is victory possible? Has the struggle any chance of success?

It is not enough that the people wake up, that they finally become aware of their misery and the causes thereof. True, there is a great deal of elemental power, more power indeed than in the government, taken together with all the ruling classes; but an elemental force lacking organization is not a real power. It is upon this incontestable advantage of organized force over the elemental force of the people that the might of the State is based.

Consequently, the question is not whether they [the people] have the capacity to rebel, but whether they are capable of building up an organization enabling them to bring the rebellion to a victorious end - not just to a casual victory but to a prolonged and ultimate triumph. *Op. cit.*, pp. 366 - 367

In my opinion, the problem is not that this is extreme - but that in one particular way it is dated. What dates the picture of the state is the reference to conscious conspiracy. Today we can still see the state consolidated into a global network of controls that determine employment and unemployment, development and undevelopment, but the point is that this is not accessible in its completeness and entirety *to the consciousness* of those who are dominated or, for that matter, those who dominate. I should like to attempt an updating of Bakunin's vision.

### **The State Today**

At the opening of a new century and after a century of unprecedented violence, humanity finds itself divided into two, on a globe bisected by a line that runs from the bottom of Mexico, through the Mediterranean Sea, and then northward through the Caspian Sea and the Urals. On one side of it is the North, on the other side the South, except for some outposts of the North that include Japan, Australia and New Zealand. This North is sometimes called "the West" because it is the heir of Western history. Though its political capital now is Washington, in fact it is the successor to the imperial centres of several different empires, the British, the French, the Russian, and others. The North is the regrouping in which all the old imperial centres are now fused into a single hegemonic entity. On the other side of the line, with some exceptions as I noted, are the regions and territories that were once occupied by one or another of the old empires. The South has come to resemble a vast plain that is kept under watch by a North that, in relation to the countries of the plain, appears as a gigantic fortress. Such a harsh duality is not yet entirely realized, but it is the tendency, the possibility, that is inherent in many of the policies pursued by the countries of the North, especially by the current government of the U. S. A.

The North contains perhaps twenty or thirty states, but it is not because of their political constitutions that they form a hegemonic unity. These states all extend their power and their life into a group of further organizations, including several military alliances, especially NATO, and several economic unions, especially the EU. These state-extensions are crucial to the vital fabric of the North. Further extensions of the states are such entities as the International Monetary Fund and the regular conferences of the G-8, which contribute greatly to the unity and hegemony of the North. Though the states differ among themselves in power, wealth and culture, and though the U. S. A. now enjoys unchallenged primacy among them, still, when we view them together with the state-extensions, we become more aware of their unity than their division. That is what the American press now describes - using the language of war - as "the U. S. and its allies."



In addition to the states and the state-extensions, we need to recognize the innumerable corporations that, under the present constitutions of the Northern states, are defined as "the private sector." They are innumerable because they come and go perpetually, and enter into fluid combinations with ever-new names and acronyms. Corporations in extractive industries, manufacturing, transport, computers, etc., tend to work in concert with financial companies and banks, and it is impossible to separate their activities from those of the states and the state-extensions. The IMF and the World Bank work with the national banks and the international corporations. I might call this third sector the Capitalist Internationale. Traditional constitutional theory calls it "private-sector," but now it blends seamlessly into the activities of the states and the state-extensions, playing the most important part of all in differentiating the fortress of the North from the Southern plain. The Capitalist Internationale is one part of the fortress state. Capitalist libertarians who complain about "state power" and want to liberate the "private sector" are in fact working, through the Capitalist Internationale, to secure the hegemonic control of the actual state, the Northern fortress.

So Bakunin's nightmare vision of the state does have its application today, and is echoed in different ways by philosophers in our time, Heidegger, for instance, with his vision of technology, and Foucault, with his analysis of power. Moreover, many recent meetings of the G-8 and other international organizations have been picketed by protesting demonstrators, and I believe that they are guided by similar ideas about the gulf between the fortress and the plain.

But there is the other possibility - that the divide between the North and the South might become ameliorated. Whether it could be eliminated altogether in the long run is a question with no ready answer now. Today's North-South confrontation is not the same as earlier ones like "East and West" or "Communism versus the Free World." For one thing, the South is not a unity or an entity to the degree that the North is. In the not-too-distant past, many of these countries were represented by Communism, whether Moscow-line or Peking-line, but the possibility of Communist leadership of the South now appears to be gone forever. The Islamic world is only one part of the South, and will never be able to represent it as a whole. A Southern unity of interest that would arise from resistance to the fortress is certainly conceivable, but at the moment can only be seen in fits and starts. Many initiatives that are afoot today can strengthen solidarity among these countries.

There is the vast array of Non-Governmental Organizations, in which local leaders make widespread fraternal contacts, and they can accommodate helpers and experts from the North.

There is the U. N., with its various agencies, that has consolidated its position as an advocate for the South. There are the world religious organizations that have worked, usually, in concert with the U. N. and the N. G. O.'s. Anarchists need to learn about the work of religious organizations, and overcome the hostility to religion and churches that they have inherited from 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-clericalism and 19<sup>th</sup> century atheism and materialism. Of course, religion itself is brimming with differences and contradictions.

The world-wide ecumenical churches, including the Catholic, have a necessary role in the future of the South. Some currents of Catholicism, however, are still wedded to hierarchy and authority, and will probably inhibit unity and peace in the world. Some of the sects that sprang up in the U. S. A. over the past century and a half have little connection to world Christianity and merely articulate the ideas of Fortress America. A fourth force for unity and peace is what I shall try to describe below as a contemporary application of anarchist syndicalism.

### Inside the Fortress

Now to focus on the impact of the contemporary state upon individuals and groups living in the North. I cannot really thread my way through this infinite mass of experiences, whose meaning is of course controversial. So I'll draw on just one study that is illuminating and suggestive. It illustrates how a government programme, basing itself on scientific research, works its way through the education and health systems, and, interacting with private entrepreneurial initiatives, television and the press, weighs heavily in the conscious and unconscious minds of all, and governs behaviour and interaction on a vast scale. This is a study of the physical fitness industry: Brian Pronger's book *Body Fascism: Salvation in the Technology of Physical Fitness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). This physical fitness phenomenon reaches through the educational system ("phys. ed."), including the post-secondary sector where the kiniseology faculty promotes research, and trains phys. ed. trainers. Governments in Canada, like other governments, contributed their policies and publications to promote fitness in the population (Pronger, pp. 126 - 129); the life sciences were assembled into a science of fitness with their own production of texts (pp.129 - 136); popular publications of every kind, in magazine or other format, engulf the population (pp. 136 - 143) and facilities are created in vast array for training of every kind; the media and publication circulate endlessly representations of fit bodies for advertising and other purposes (143 - 144); all this with tremendous effects on all of us in the use of our time, as we all (yes, I too) make our way daily to the gym, and in the mirror confront the daily disappointment. If we compare this particular growth to other sectors of life,<sup>18</sup> common structures that will strike us include: a grounding upon scientific research; the existence of specialists who advise, promote and regulate correct procedures for everything; dissemination of information to the public on how everything is done - in short, what we call bureaucracy, with no difference between the private and public sectors. Inside the fortress, the ancient goals of the state - justice, liberty and welfare - have undergone a mutation into a thicket of regulations, guarantees, procedures and codes, all supervised by duly designated officials. Inside the fortress, the state multiplies into innumerable micro-states: departments, corporations and schools in which every question will have its answer, and every need its remedy, if you just know where to go or who to ask. The state, in its current mutation in the age of technology, is the prototype for all these authority

---

<sup>18</sup> I would include the educational system, health care, welfare, the police and correctional systems, the judiciary, entertainment, the military, the Internet, banking and finance, publishing, the arts, resource industries, manufacture, broadcasting and television, transport, construction and many others.

structures. The communication to all of us, that procedures are there to be followed, is almost entirely to the unconscious mind.

If there is truth in this picture, we wonder whether there is any possibility of relief. Could there be some type of reform, or rebellion, or revolution, in which the subjects might reclaim their freedom and self-government? What does reason say? Here we might look back to the earlier anarchists.

### **The Anarchist Dream**

The Proudhon-Bakunin idea has its positive sides in addition to critique, and if we mention some of that, we might also ponder contemporary application.

(a) Laws of Freedom. Bakunin's writings brim with visions of the stateless community, and one of the points of interest to us is the place of law. He does not deny that a community of free individuals would have laws, but their status would be quite unlike the status of laws in a state. He calls for:

Abolition of all criminal, civil and legal codes now administered in Europe: because the code of liberty can be created only by liberty itself...All attempts to combat social immorality by rigorous legislation which violates individual freedom must fail.<sup>19</sup>

But this does not mean that there is no law at all, for we also read that:

Individuals condemned by the laws of any and every association (commune, province, region or nation) reserve the right to escape punishment by declaring that they wish to resign from that association. But in this case, the association will have the equal right to expel him and declare him outside its guarantee and protection.<sup>20</sup>

The laws have been accepted by the individual in freedom, and he maintains freedom while adhering to the laws. So membership in the community is absolutely voluntary, including the observance of laws, and this differentiates laws of freedom from those of the state. The community's sanction is expulsion, but it cannot pursue the offender or require extradition, so ultimately it lacks the power to compel. Another sanction Bakunin speaks of is "loss of political rights" (p. 80): participation in the community's self-government can be denied those who are lazy or immoral. Nevertheless, such persons will maintain "economic rights": upkeep, clothing, food, shelter. Loss of political rights, however, can include loss of the custody of your children (p. 81). There remains the absolute right of political agitation, extending also to those who campaign against anarchism. This quick outline, contrasting the laws of freedom with those of the state,

---

<sup>19</sup> "Revolutionary Catechism" [1866], in Dolgoff, *Bakunin on Anarchism*, pp. 78, 80.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 81.

shows clearly that Bakunin is presupposing a small political unit, the "commune", and *if* that is granted, we can see that he is offering a credible alternative to the traditional philosophy of legislation.

(b) The Commune. The philosophy of the commune was elaborated later on by Kropotkin, though it is always clear that Bakunin is presupposing the decentralized order of things. Urbanism, according to Kropotkin, was the matrix of most of the valuable achievements of civilization by virtue of the relative freedom and co-operation it tended to promote, whereas the state descended historically from the conquests of war-lords (i. e., royalty and aristocrats) who gained mastery over vast territories, forests and plains.<sup>21</sup> And anarchist practice (for example, the history we reviewed near the beginning of the paper) has confirmed the idea that co-operation as such poses no threat to individual freedom and development. This stands as a beacon for the political theory that, in recent years, has been tormented by the antagonism between communitarian and libertarian values. The sharpness of this antagonism is conditioned by its being conceived under the aegis of legislation and authority, i. e., the state.

Bakunin, as we quoted above, assumed that the communes would be federated into "province, region and nation." He also believed that the course of history was leading to a world-wide federation absolutely inescapably (Dolgoft, p. 106). In what sense, then, is his federalism different from a state regime, and why isn't the eventual world union a world state? Many provisions we read of in both Bakunin and Kropotkin intend to guarantee statelessness at every level, but what seems to be central to them is a distinction between what is "political" and what is "economic." Bakunin in particular seems to work with a difference between what is conscious and what is unconscious. The force towards federation is the economic force - it is an involuntary tendency towards centralism, an aspect of our life of which we have only partial awareness, and which is not governed by any overall policy. Our political consciousness is directed towards the life of the commune. The centralizing drift, however, stems from unsupervised interactions of groups and companies in different places, with no provincial or national parliaments.

The dream of a libertarian commune is beautiful and inspiring, but the question that concerns this paper is whether reason requires it. If no real way could be found to get from "here" to "there," then we'd have to call it a utopia, an idea of the imagination rather than reason. Many such communities have been attempted on a small scale, both in the countryside and in urban districts, with some wonderful results. The builders have earned our utmost respect. Nevertheless, the communities have remained isolated and have not revolutionized society. Perhaps they signify not so much reason in history as reason withdrawn from history. But caution is appropriate here. Reason is always inventive, and may surprise us. We should concede at the present time that this anarchist communism is not a requirement of reason, but I think that syndicalism needs another look.

---

<sup>21</sup> "The State: Its Historic Role," in *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, pp. 2110 - 264.

### Economic Life

This was the subject of passionate interest to Proudhon, and was developed further by Bakunin. He considered that labour organizations already possessed the power and the wisdom to lead a universal revolution, not needing the guidance of any Central Committee or Socialist Party or intellectual theorists. The idea of "scientific socialism" was particularly abhorrent to him, for he had observed in the different French revolutions that human beings, by virtue of their inherent liberty, has the further capacity for spontaneous organization. Rebellion was already a creative force. And anarcho-syndicalism, as the revolutionary workers' movement came to be called, was the expression of this. It made the claim that productive workers in manufacture and all industry already possessed all the skill that was necessary for administration and management of all economic life. No need for bosses, whether in the revolution or in industry or in the state.

In fact, however, syndicalist ventures have had an unhappy history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whether we think of German "co-determination," or Yugoslav and Algerian ventures in "workers' control," or in efforts in that direction in Canada and the U. S. A. It may be that workers have sniffed out a hidden political agenda in those who have sought to promote workers' control, and avoided it as not being a project of workers themselves. Still, if one looks at the labour scene today, there are many indicators of critical and creative workers' initiatives.

One of the ecological dangers we confront arises through unsafe industrial practices in chemical industries as well as mining, smelting and so on. The first victims are often industrial workers themselves. We read, e. g., of "the increased rate of breast cancer in female chemical industry workers,"<sup>22</sup> and virtually anybody can tell you about injury and sickness resulting from work in polluting steel plants, nuclear facilities, and so on. The workers who have reported such practices have generally organized more effectively to fight them than have state or provincial governments.<sup>23</sup>

Again, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen the emergence and consolidation of a new group of workers whose work lies at the heart of industry and indeed of modern society: workers in research, members of "the knowledge industry." They are greater in number internationally than was the proletariat of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and constitute more of a mobile fraternity than did the old working class. They are also mobile in the sense that they move around among firms and across industrial sectors, and (just as important) are to be found not only in industry, but in universities, schools, research establishments, medical establishments of all sorts, and departments of government. They have their hands directly on the "forces of production." Like all human groups, they vary greatly in outlook, of course, yet as a group they are strong in their attachment to the scientific method, truth in reporting, and academic freedom - attributes that are certain to exercise influence in the management of technology and its impact on human beings and the

---

<sup>22</sup> Margarita Alario, "Science, Ethics and Policy Responses to the 'Organized Irresponsibility'", *Democracy and Nature VI* (2002), 187. This article documents unsafe practices in many industries world-wide.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 193.

environment, and that resist the compromises and betrayals that tempt all governments. The name of "anarcho-syndicalism" may seem odd for this, and yet that is the reality and the potential. Needless, to say, this is a force that crosses the border between the fortress of the North and the plain of the South, and has enormous potential for promoting worldwide fraternity.

Syndicalist ideas, combined with some of the initiatives taken in the South that I mentioned above, might have a long-term potential for reviving anarchist communes, and breathing into them the breath of life, though, as I have conceded, one cannot yet assert that reason is on the anarchist side.

### Freedom and Rebellion

Our study has brought us to the confrontation between the fortress and the commune, neither of them being able to lay claim to the title of reason. It seems that reason would appear wherever a pathway is discovered that leads away from the fortress towards an increase in liberty or justice or welfare. Perhaps some of the paths we have been pointing to do meet that requirement. There are no grounds for identifying reason itself with one particular scheme of things, such as the commune that we have imagined. More likely is that reason resides in the very rebellion, the act of refusing a given state of affairs such as the fortress. If the rebellion adopts an ideal utopia as its guiding light, it is still the rebellion itself that incarnates reason, not the utopia. The image of utopia is secondary, something projected in the movement of rebellion itself. Reason is not the calculation of the benefits that might arise from this or that state of affairs, contrasting one image with another. Reason is the firm grasp of the *principle*. Bakunin articulated a philosophy of freedom, which comes through whenever he speaks of the human power of rebellion. Rebellion is every bit as central to human existence as thinking is, and as our material needs are.<sup>24</sup> While the social world tempts us to timid obeisance, it is by rebelling against its guidance, against social convention and popular prejudice, that we fulfill the truest and most valuable part of our being, the instinct for freedom that can never be finally crushed.<sup>25</sup> Rebellion itself is the very deed of freedom. It is the same thing as freedom. This point needs also to be applied to our search for reason in history: reason appeared in the spontaneous activism of the *sans-culottes*, in the Kronstadt uprising and in the struggles of Ukrainian peasantry, in the war against Franco and the collectives of Andalusia - it appeared in the projects, not in their guiding ideals or in their results.

If freedom is rebellion itself, there could arise the suspicion that it is an utterly arbitrary power, a pointless rebellion, without goal and without motive. There is perhaps a current of nihilism in the thought of Bakunin that we must beware. But in the present study we cannot accept the conclusion that rebellion is a formless negation. If rebellion is the face of reason in history, then there are constraints that come into force that

---

<sup>24</sup> Bakunin, *God and the State*, edited by Paul Avrich (New York: Dover, 1970), pp. 9 - 12.

<sup>25</sup> See Dolgoff, pp. 239 - 240.

belong to the very structure of freedom itself, its form, its idea. The rebellion of reason is not arbitrary, which is to say that rebellion will always have in it a plea for reform, an idea of reform: wage reform, land reform, welfare reform. Reform in itself is perhaps less than rebellion, but it is a component therein. The rational component of reform that belongs to rebellion need not be the conscious intention of the rebels - it can operate unconsciously, as the implicit demands of the rebellion. And I believe that this theme has been revived and strengthened by modern existential philosophy. It can be found in many places, but I'll zero in on a few ideas of Albert Camus, especially from his book *The Rebel*.<sup>26</sup> That freedom itself *is* rebellion is affirmed just as much by Camus as by Bakunin, even though Camus was suspicious of him. What Camus supposes in his book is the rebellion of workers against totalitarian and unreasonable bosses. The very act of rebellion discloses to the rebel what he values in himself, the line that he will not permit the boss to cross. The rebel is the one who says No. But rebellion is also the point of origin of a genuine community of workers, the point of transition from purely individual existence to the solidarity of the group: in Camus' beautiful phrase that rings the changes on Descartes: "I rebel, therefore we exist" (p. 250). And Camus, so consciously a partisan of "Mediterranean moderation," establishes that with the discovery of the line within the self that brooks no transgression, there appears also the line outside the self, the limit. This rebel is not to kill his oppressor, and, in relation to the "we" that became constituted in the rebellion, the rebel recognizes the inviolability of every one of his comrades. The further conclusion Camus draws is that the *rebellion* is not to become further transmuted into *revolution*. Revolution is that immoderate project that never stops, continuing to transform every institution without limit into the likeness of that image that had guided the rebellion, seeking to secure ultimate command of all sectors in the revolutionary regime. Here Camus shows himself the anarchist rather than the professional revolutionary. Rebellion is a self-limiting undertaking, and discloses the essence of freedom itself as self-limiting. This is the authentic note of anarchism, as we see it in a poster set up by Nestor Makhno as his forces liberated a part of Ukraine:

The freedom of the workers and peasants is their own, and not subject to any restriction. It is up to the workers and peasants themselves to act, to organize themselves, to agree among themselves in all aspects of their lives, as they themselves see fit and desire...The Makhnovists can do no more than give aid and counsel...In no circumstances can they, nor do they wish to, govern.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> *L'homme revolte* (Paris Gallimard: 1951). English translation by Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage, 1956).

<sup>27</sup> Guerin, *Anarchism*, p. 99.